

MAYOR'S COMMISSION ON SOCIAL EQUITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY REPORT

MAY 2022



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MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-CHAIRS

To Norfolk community members:

Attached you will find the final report from the Norfolk Mayor's Commission on Social Equity & Economic Opportunity. The goal of this Commission was to identify opportunities for Norfolk's underserved communities to allow them to live healthier, safer, and more financially independent lives in which they and future generations can thrive. As Commission Co-Chairs, we would like to thank Mayor Alexander and our Council colleagues for supporting this effort to develop community-led recommendations to address Norfolk's disparities in social equity and economic opportunity.

Over the last 18 months, our dedicated Commission members met monthly to examine and evaluate city policies with staff from both city departments and community partners. The Commission focused on four strategic categories:

- affordable housing
- economic opportunity
- health/food security, and
- youth/education.

From these discussions, each subcommittee provided recommendations that are detailed in this report.

Our focus from the start was to allow our Community Commissioners to lead the efforts. As Co-Chairs, our role was to connect our community commission members with staff and resources, to find answers to their questions and to help identify additional community partners. After many meetings (most of which were held virtually due to the pandemic), the commission members shared their draft recommendations with the Norfolk community in a virtual meeting. They solicited feedback via an online community survey (posted on the city website), social media channels, emails to all civic leagues, and in paper copies available at Norfolk Public Libraries and Engage Norfolk.

All this input, survey feedback, data and other input culminated in these report recommendations.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the many Norfolk staff members who assisted in this effort, and especially for the leadership provided by Aleea Slappy Wilson, Director of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, and her team member Jalesha Smith (who took minutes at *every* SEEO meeting!). Additionally, we are forever grateful for Barbara Hamm Lee, who masterfully led each meeting and ensured that every voice was heard and supported.

Last but certainly not least, we are extremely thankful for our dedicated Community Commission members, who spent so much time researching and working to understand Norfolk's resources, as well as identifying gaps and opportunities for additional funding and staffing. Your work and commitment are valued, and we look forward to supporting your recommendations in the forthcoming city budgets and staffing plans.

Sincerely,



Andria P. McClellan
Councilmember, Superward 6



Danica J. Royster
Councilmember, Superward 7

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the disparities and inequities that exist throughout our country. Among the many challenges facing our society is the growing need for access to healthy food options, affordable housing, safe environments for youth, and economic opportunity for families and business owners.

These disparities are not unique to Norfolk; rather they are among the challenges that cities across the United States are committed to addressing through local policy, programming, and service delivery. Starting in 2000, the Standing Panel on Social Equity of the National Academy of Public Administration issued a report that defined social equity and recognized equity as a pillar of public administration.¹

Like many other municipalities, Norfolk has committed to advancing equity throughout the government. In 2019, the city formally began its equity efforts with the creation of a new position, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer. This position was added as a key role in the City Manager's office, with a focus on identifying systemic barriers within the city, making policy recommendations, and identifying programming opportunities designed to address inequities.

Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity

Mayor Kenneth C. Alexander, PhD announced the creation of the Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity during the June 2, 2020, City Council meeting. In his statement, Mayor Alexander acknowledged the police brutality and racially motivated violence that was occurring throughout the country. "We have determined that the continued success of our city will be determined by our ability to recognize our legacy of injustice, atone, and appreciate everyone's humanity, and begin the long process of healing together. Our continued growth and evolution as a modern city will always demand this."² According to

¹ Jacob, B. (2020). *Governing For Equity: Implementing an Equity Lens in Local Government*. International City Managers Association.

² Alexander, M. C. (2020). Announcement of Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity. *Norfolk City Council Meeting*. Norfolk : City Of Norfolk .

Mayor Alexander, he formed the Commission to “address historical and persistent issues that have impacted access and opportunity for Norfolk’s residents, while examining social and economic anxiety, and creating a true bridge that should connect Norfolk’s various communities.”³

On November 16, 2020, a group of Norfolk citizens convened virtually for their first meeting as the Mayor’s Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity. Their goal: to identify challenges and outline recommendations to address the inequities that exist for Norfolk residents, business, and the overall community.

This report will outline the steps that the commission members have taken to discover the barriers and identify current programming, policies, resources, and best practices that have helped address inequities throughout the country. As a result of their work, the commission members identified specific next steps that the City of Norfolk could take in four key areas: (1) Economic Opportunity (2) Health and Food Insecurity (3) Affordable Housing and (4) Education and Youth.

Summary of The Process

Each member of the Mayor’s Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity was assigned two subcommittees to participate in based on their experience, passion, and personal interest. The subcommittees met virtually every month for 18 months. Each subcommittee operated as a working group meeting with community members, reviewing current programming and policies and researching best practices from other municipalities. Each subcommittee was supported by two Norfolk staff members who conducted research, identified local experts, and provided insight to the committee members based on their role within the city. The Commission members used all the information they gathered to develop recommendations that would advance efforts that had already begun in the Diversity Equity and Inclusion Office in partnership with the departments of Planning, Economic Development, Housing and Community Development, Neighborhood Services, as well as the Norfolk Emerging Leaders program.

After each subcommittee identified their preliminary recommendations, the Commission members decided to hold a community meeting to share their findings and obtain feedback from Norfolk residents and business owners.

The community input meeting was held virtually on Monday, February 28, 2022. More than 60 stakeholders attended the event. Each subcommittee shared their findings and

³ Alexander, M. C. (2020). Announcement of Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity. *Norfolk City Council Meeting*. Norfolk : City Of Norfolk .

recommendations. Then, Commissioners facilitated four breakout rooms to ask questions and gather feedback from attendees on the recommendations. Additionally, the Commission members wanted to receive feedback from those who could not attend the community event. Therefore, an electronic survey was developed that detailed the recommendations and allowed community members to rank the Subcommittee recommendations as well as provide comments and suggestions. This survey was made available both online and as a hard copy during March 2022. This additional community feedback was used to make final recommendations that are outlined in this report.

Summary of the Findings

Each of the four subcommittees researched the current programs, services and policies related to their focus area. They interviewed community stakeholders and other local experts to gain additional understanding. They researched best practices from other municipalities. After reviewing all this information, Commission members developed their recommendations. The subcommittees then identified their top priorities to highlight and share with Mayor Alexander and City Council. The subcommittee priorities are:

1 Economic Opportunity:

- Create a Minority Business Development Center as a resource for business owners seeking tax planning, accounting services, marketing, legal, business planning, etc.
- Offer monthly quarterly "pulse checks" with businesses conducted by staff of the Minority Business Center.
- Develop a Marketing and Communications staff position, embedded in the Minority Business Development Center, to ensure regular outreach and engagement with the minority business community.

2 Health and Food Insecurity:

- Increase access to healthy, affordable food through the creation of Neighborhood Food Markets & Health Clinics, in partnership with local universities/medical programs.
- Expand awareness of and access to mental health services by increasing funding to the Community Services Board to fund additional affordable mental telehealth services.
- Decrease "heat islands" and mitigate flooding by improving the City's tree canopy, increase flood prevention funding, and supporting the federal Green Infrastructure Plan.

3

Affordable Housing:

- Create a user-friendly, real-time, searchable database of affordable housing that includes data on access to transit, healthcare, grocery stores, schools, etc.
- Remove barriers to developers building affordable houses by providing city-approved affordable housing plan books as well as access to grants and training.
- Establish inclusionary zoning policies to ensure the creation of more affordable housing units.
- Establish a fair auction process for city-owned GEM lots.

4

Education and Youth:

- Create a mentorship program for youth and/or young adults (ages 14-25) to prepare them for adulthood by encouraging career exploration, team building, and goal setting.
- Create Project Safe Neighborhood Program to address crime, including gun violence, among youth.
- Reopen and revitalize recreational centers to include 21st century technology such as a digital check in process, tech education programs, and virtual trainings.

MAYOR'S COMMISSION ON SOCIAL EQUITY AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Mayor

Dr. Kenneth Cooper Alexander, PhD

Co-Chairs

Ms. Andria McClellan, Councilmember, Superward 6

Ms. Danica Royster, Councilmember, Superward 7

Commission Members

Stacie L. Armstead, Citizen Member

Rev. Moses Asamoah, Jr., Citizen Member

Patricia Lerma Bracknell, Citizen Member

Paula F. Daniels, Citizen Member

Del. Jacqueline H. Glass, Citizen Member

Dwight McDowell, Citizen Member

Patricia Richardson, Citizen Member

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***Thank you to all presenters
and participants who
provided invaluable
information and support to
the Mayor's Commission on
Social Equity and Economic
Opportunity.***

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMISSION

Mayor Kenneth C. Alexander, PhD announced the creation of the Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity during the June 2, 2020, Norfolk City Council meeting. In his statement, Mayor Alexander acknowledged the police brutality and racially motivated violence that was occurring throughout the country. "We have determined that the continued success of our city will be determined by our ability to recognize our legacy of injustice, atone, and appreciate everyone's humanity, and begin the long process of healing together. Our continued growth and evolution as a modern city will always demand this."⁴ Mayor Alexander said he formed the commission to "address historical and persistent issues that have impacted access and opportunity for Norfolk's residents, while examining social and economic anxiety, and creating a true bridge that should connect Norfolk's various communities."⁵

The Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity held their first meeting on November 16, 2020. This virtual meeting kicked off the process of identifying challenges and outlining recommendations to advance equity and address the inequities that exists for Norfolk residents, business, and the overall community.

Each Commission member was assigned two subcommittees to participate in based on their experience, passion, and personal interest. The subcommittees met virtually every month for 17 months. Each subcommittee operated as a working group; meeting with community members, reviewing current programming and policies and researching best practices from other municipalities. Each subcommittee was supported by two staff members who conducted research, identified local experts, and provided insight to the committee members based on their role within the City of Norfolk. The Commission members used the information they gathered to develop recommendations that would advance efforts already begun within the city by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Office in partnership with the Departments of Planning, Economic Development, Housing and Community Development, Neighborhood Services, and the Norfolk Emerging Leaders program.

The work of this Commission is complemented by efforts the City of Norfolk has made over the past several years to address inequities through a variety of means: poverty reduction

⁴ Alexander, M. C. (2020). Announcement of Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity. *Norfolk City Council Meeting* . Norfolk : City Of Norfolk .

⁵ Alexander, M. C. (2020). Announcement of Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity. *Norfolk City Council Meeting* . Norfolk : City Of Norfolk .

programs, policy changes, creation of new departments and offices to focus the City's equity efforts. This timeline demonstrates key steps the city took to advance equity, increase economic opportunity, create affordable housing, address health disparities and support education and resources for youth.

- **June 2014:** Norfolk Plan to Reduce Poverty released with recommendations to improve the lives of Norfolk residents living in poverty.
- **December 2016:** Norfolk Works launched to help Norfolk citizens prepare for and connect to in-demand employment opportunities.
- **February 2017:** Small Business Initiative created, supporting the start and growth of small, minority and women owned businesses.
- **September 2017:** Lifelong Learning Commission created by Mayor Alexander.
- **January 2018:** St. Paul's Redevelopment Plan adopted by City Council.
- **August 2018:** People First launched to provide supportive services to Tidewater Gardens residents.
- **March 2019:** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer position created.
- **July 2020:** Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity adopted by City Council.
- **December 2020:** Economic Inclusion Plan and Procurement Policy adopted by City Council, establishing city spending goals for women and minority owned firms.
- **July 2021:** The St. Paul's Redevelopment Office expanded to create the Department of Housing and Community Development.
- **July 2021:** Norfolk selected to participate in Local Foods, Local Places (LFLP), a federal program focusing on providing fresh food options to community members.
- **August 2021:** Community Feed in Broad Creek created, providing access to fresh and free groceries. The Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore operates this program, in partnership with local churches, Booker T. Washington High School, and Norfolk State University.
- **August 2021:** Norfolk Parks and Recreation offers the Schools Out Afternoon Recreation (S.O.A.R) After School Program (2021-22 school year) for Norfolk Public School K-8 students.
- **September 2021:** Berkeley Supermarket opened; Berkeley neighborhood is no longer a food desert.
- **November 2021:** Closing the Wealth Gap ordinance adopted by City Council.
- **April 2022:** Spring Break Camp, hosted by Norfolk's Department of Parks and Recreation, available again for Norfolk children ages 5-12.
- **June 2022:** Norfolk Emerging Leaders restarts after pausing in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19.
- **June 2022:** Summer Camps, hosted by Norfolk's Department of Parks and Recreation, returns; Explorer Summer Camp serves ages 5-12, Navigators Summer Camp serves ages 13-16.

Introduction

The Commission held its first meeting virtually on Monday November 16, 2020. At this meeting, the DEI Office provided context on Norfolk's current efforts to address inequities and create equitable outcome and economic growth.

There were four subcommittees created for the Commission (1) Economic Opportunity, (2) Health and Food Insecurity, (3) Affordable Housing and (4) Education and Youth.

Commission members were asked to rank their interest in each subcommittee. Then, Commission members were assigned to two subcommittees that met monthly for 17 months. During the monthly meetings, the members learned about the challenges and barriers related to their subcommittee focus area, identified resources and current programming that exists, researched, and discussed best practices, surveyed the community and as a final step, will provide their findings and recommendations to City Council in this report.

Subcommittees

Economic Opportunity

The Economic Opportunity Subcommittee examined the systemic barriers that have caused the racial wealth gap and hindered communities from obtaining livable wage employment, profitable businesses, and access to financial resources to assist with business ownership and growth. The subcommittee researched business development centers, accelerators and technical assistance programs offered in other communities to determine what resources were needed to support and advance Norfolk based minority-owned businesses.

Health and Food Insecurity

The Health and Food Insecurity Subcommittee explored the elements that impact health, wellness, and food access for Norfolk residents. This subcommittee explored the social determinants of health and identified the barriers and challenges associated with residents' access to fresh food, medical resources, public spaces, and other wellness opportunities.

Affordable Housing

The Affordable Housing Subcommittee explored the current housing market in Norfolk. The subcommittee identified the barriers and challenges associated with individuals securing affordable housing, defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a dwelling that households can obtain for 30 percent or less of the total household income.

Education and Youth

The Education and Youth Subcommittee researched the Norfolk Public School District, local community youth programs and mentorship opportunities. The subcommittee explored the current program offerings for Norfolk youth and young adults and researched resources and programming opportunities that are available in other communities that have proven to help with the development, equitable education, safety and growth of youth and young adults.

THE DISCOVERY

Each of the four subcommittees used their initial meetings to discuss the challenges and barriers related to the theme of their subcommittee. During the first several meetings, City staff shared the historical context of steps that the city has previously or is currently taking to address each of the topics.

Staff shared reports, policy information and programs that the City has currently or previously offered related to each focus area. The Commissioners conducted interviews with local experts and community representatives, they also utilized secondary research to help better understand the systemic issues that are prevalent within each focus area.

The Economic Opportunity Subcommittee hosted a small business roundtable. During the roundtable, members heard from several local business owners about their experience starting and growing businesses in Norfolk and throughout the Hampton Roads region. The business owners shared their reasons for starting a business in cities other than Norfolk as well as many of the barriers they have encountered in trying to access business resources. They shared their challenges with accessing capital and highlighted a need for business mentorship and guidance beyond the start-up phase of their business.

The Health and Food Insecurity Subcommittee invited several local experts to advise their group including Dr. Keith Newby, a Norfolk-based cardiologist and Health Equity Director for Sentara Hospital, Sara Fuller, City of Norfolk Director of the Community Services Board and Dr. Anna Peoples, a Norfolk pharmacist and entrepreneur and owner of Peoples Pharmacy.

The Affordable Housing Subcommittee met with several housing experts, including Donna Mills, Chief Housing Officer with the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA). Donna Mills provided the subcommittee with information about the Housing Choice Voucher program. The committee also met with Earl Fraley, Norfolk City Planning Commissioner. He spoke with the subcommittee about “NIMBYism”, an acronym for the phrase “not in my back yard”. He shared that “NIMBYism” has a negative connotation and sometimes pits neighbor against neighbor. However, he also shared those conversations about NIMBYism can sometimes bring forth ideas that have not been considered by staff, encourage community participation, and provide a sense of how neighborhoods are impacted.

The Education and Youth Subcommittee did not hold any external meetings with stakeholders. Member of this subcommittee currently serve as coaches, principals, and

youth leaders in the Norfolk community and used their lived experience and professional expertise as a guide when making their recommendations.

After adequate review of the current landscape and best practices, the Commissioners brainstormed steps Norfolk could take to address each challenge. Each recommendation by the Commission is based on opportunities where Norfolk can take the lead and build on its current efforts and progress. While each Subcommittee created an extensive list of recommendations, they were each asked to identify the top three to five priorities to recommend to City Council in each focus area.

Once they identified their top recommendations, the Commission met in person to share their preliminary findings during an in-person meeting at City Hall on November 15, 2021. After this meeting, the commission members decided they also wanted to share the findings and initial recommendations with the community and other stakeholders to gain additional feedback that would help finalize their recommendations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SURVEY

The Commission hosted a virtual community input meeting to share their findings and recommendations with stakeholders. Recognizing that not all interested parties would be able to attend the meeting, the Commission also created a survey that included their recommendations and allowed participants to rank the top recommendations from each subcommittee and provide comments and feedback.

The meeting was held on Monday February 28, 2022, from 6pm-8pm on Zoom. After providing a brief overview of the Commission and the mission of the group, each subcommittee shared their recommendations with the more than 60 attendees. Following the overview of the recommendations, breakout rooms were available so attendees could provide feedback and ask the commission members specific questions about their recommendations.

Community Survey Results

The community survey was available on the City of Norfolk website following the community input meeting; it was featured on the “Community Spotlight” section on the homepage of Norfolk.gov. The Commission wanted to ensure that there was an opportunity for stakeholders to offer feedback individually on each recommendation in addition to providing other recommendations for future consideration. In addition, the survey was sent out to various e-mail and listservs within the city. A flyer was created to encourage individuals to take the survey. The flyer featured a QR code to make it easier for stakeholders to access the survey via their mobile devices. The survey was completed by 29 participants.

Survey Participation by Zip Code

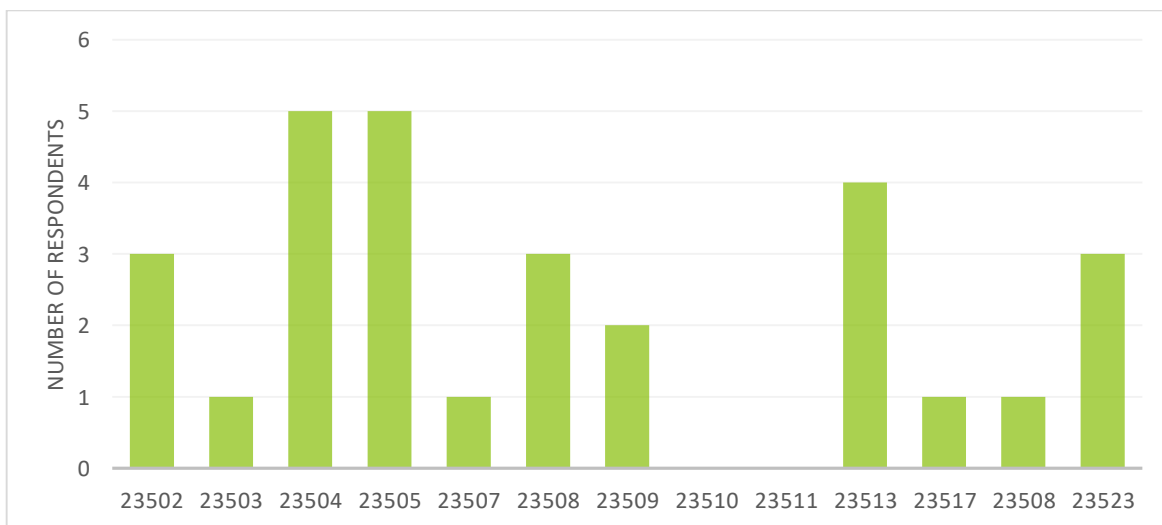


Figure 1: The bar chart above displays the number of survey participants in each Norfolk Zip Code.

Survey Participation by Ward

Ward (Find your ward here: <https://www.norfolk.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5974/2019-Wards-and-Superwards---Map>)

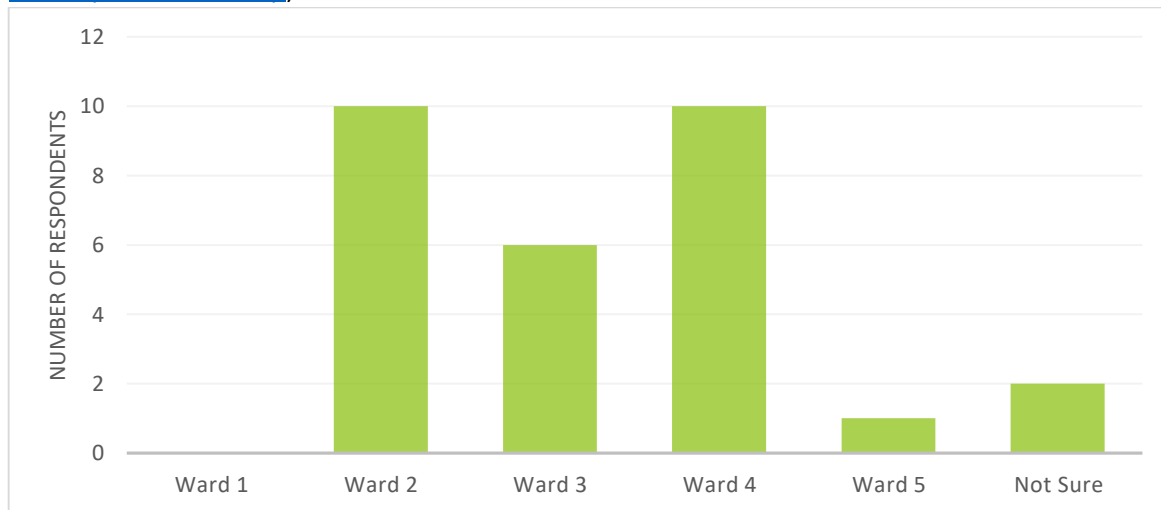


Figure 2: The bar chart above displays the number of survey participants in each Norfolk ward.

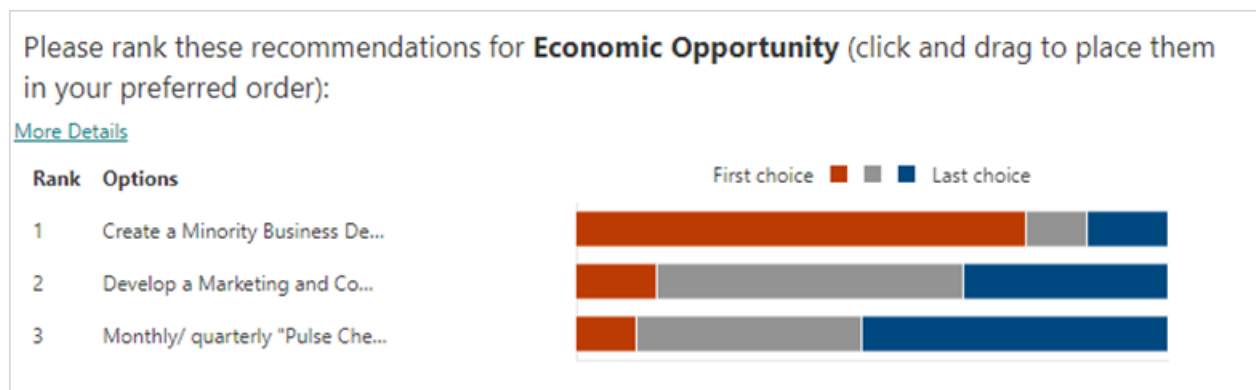
Below are key themes and other highlights from the community survey which was completed by 29 participants.

Economic Opportunity Survey Results

The Economic Opportunity Subcommittee included these recommendations.

1. Create a Minority Business Development Center to serve as a resource location for business owners seeking tax planning, accounting services, marketing, legal, business planning, etc.
2. Offer monthly quarterly "Pulse Checks" with businesses conducted by staff of the Minority Business Center.
3. Develop a Marketing and Communications position, embedded in the Minority Business Development Center, to ensure regular outreach and engagement with the minority business community.

This chart illustrates how the 29 survey participants ranked the three Economic Opportunity recommendations.



The commission wanted stakeholders to share additional recommendations that Norfolk could consider for the future.

- Create a Minority Business Development Center that would be a resource location for business owners seeking tax planning, accounting services, marketing, legal, business planning, etc.
- Monthly/ quarterly "Pulse Checks" with businesses conducted by staff of the Minority Business Center. This builds on-going relationships (trust!) that provides support and guidance for start-ups, existing and expanding businesses.
- Develop a Marketing and Communications position to ensure regular outreach and engagement with the minority business community.

“

“I feel the space should allow access to, how to, and with experts and resources for networking and building the brand. Understanding that for a lot of minority business one thing that is lacking is customer service skills.” -Survey Participant

“Seemingly effective idea for engagement. The success of this approach will only be measured by the work being done.” -Survey Participant

“I think it would be suitable for this position to consist of a team that incorporates and involves multiple groups. Often times marketing towards minority communities is done so without a full understanding of the communities in question. This creates opportunity for conflict and miscommunication.” -Survey Participant

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Here are the top recommendations from the Health and Food Insecurity Subcommittee.

- This chart shows how the 29 participants ranked the Health and Food Insecurity recommendations.



20 | Community Engagement and Survey

The Commission wanted to ensure that there was space for stakeholders to offer feedback individually on each recommendation in addition to providing other recommendations for future consideration.

Increase access to healthy, affordable food through the creation of Neighborhood Food Markets & Health Clinics, in partnership with local universities/medical programs.

“This is the obvious top priority. The current food desert that exists in some Norfolk neighborhood has got to be handled.” Survey Participant

Expand awareness of and access to mental health services by increased funding to the Community Services Board to provide additional affordable mental telehealth services.

“Patterning with places of worship in the community to disseminate information and implement programming (i.e., seminars, workshops, etc.).” Survey Participant

Decrease “heat islands” and mitigate flooding by improving City’s tree canopy, increased flood prevention funding, and supporting Green Infrastructure Plan.

“There needs to be more funding for the health and maintenance of the trees that we already have. There’s a waiting list of a year to get the Forestry.” Survey Participant

There needs to be more funding for the health and maintenance of the trees that we already have. There’s a waiting list of a year to get the Forestry.

– Survey Participant

Improve access to biking resources and increase and maintain sidewalks to encourage walking and biking.

“This is important but is less of a priority than the other proposed items.” Survey Participant

“The streets are just not wide enough to accommodate bike lanes. I do not feel safe riding in the street or even walking my dog in some places.” Survey Participant

Recommendations for future consideration?

“Free occasional community-specific nutrition education initiatives.” Survey Participant

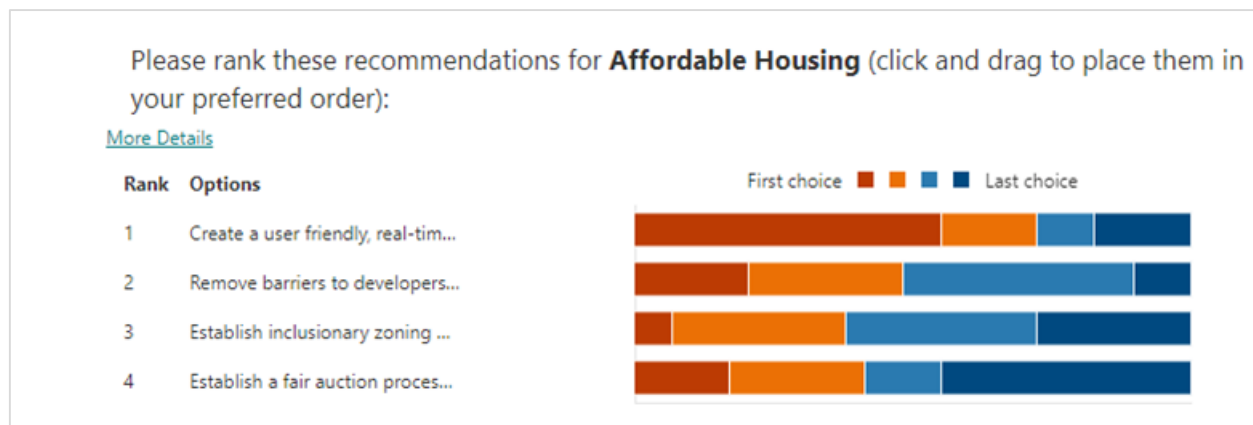
“Having community gardens in neighborhoods and partnering with/ supporting organizations like Teens with a Purpose and other organizations to provide education on growing food and cultivating.” Survey Participant

Affordable Housing Survey Recommendations

The top recommendations from the Affordable Housing Subcommittee are:

- Create a user- friendly, real-time, searchable database of affordable housing that includes data about access to transit, healthcare, grocery stores, schools, etc.
- Remove barriers to developers building affordable houses by providing city-approved plan books for affordable housing, grants, and training.
- Establish inclusionary zoning policies to ensure the creation of more affordable units.
- Establish a fair auction process for city-owned GEM lots.

The following chart shows how the 29 participants ranked the Health and Food Insecurity recommendations.



The Commission wanted to ensure there was space for stakeholders to offer feedback individually on each recommendation in addition to providing other recommendations for future consideration. Some of their comments are detailed below under the specific question:

Create a user friendly, real-time, searchable database of affordable housing including its access to transit, healthcare, grocery stores, schools, etc.

"I am in support of this idea if it also considers those who are unable to access the internet." Survey Participant

Remove barriers to developers building affordable houses by providing city-approved plan books for affordable housing, grants, and training.



Figure 5: Above is the word cloud, automatically generated from the most used words by survey participants. The larger the word, the more it was used by survey participants.

"We had many good projects and programs that worked well in the past, but just need to be refurbished so that they make sense now. A design center that works as a central point between approved builders and planners can work in tandem with the GEM lot program to increase affordable home ownership and tax revenue."

Survey Participant

Establish a fair auction process for city-owned GEM lots.

"Citizens and not developers/builders should have first smack at acquiring GEM lots. There should be a program that vertically integrates this process that should include assistance with getting pre-approved for a mortgage, and providing pre-approved non-conforming lot design, and a certified list of builders to choose from to complete the home."

Survey Participant

Establish inclusionary zoning policies to ensure the creation of more affordable units.

"Those zoning policies regulate the strength of a neighborhood. Residents in the neighborhood need to be familiar with the codes, zoning issues, and other city specifics as the buyer/renter traverses the rode to affordable housing."

Survey Participant

"The other half of this recommendation is to educate the public about the need for more affordable units. Many people living in areas that are overwhelmingly single-family homes don't want to know about the need for multi-family zoning."

Survey Participant

"This is good, but the city has limited space and there's enough NIMBY-ism to go around. Be equitable in where inclusionary housing is placed."

Survey Participant

Recommendations for future consideration?

"Also educate on property ownership and stewardship."

Survey Participant

"Affordable housing needs to be less dense. Packing people on top of each other just creates more public housing scenarios. Affordable housing should be spread out all over the city. Even the new tax credit housing is clustered in one area which will eventually lead to the same issues we have seen in public housing. In NVA and DC you see affordable units set asides in mark rate developments which in my opinion is a better mix. This way affordability is spread out"

Survey Participant

“

"Affordable housing needs to be less dense. Packing people on top of each other just creates more public housing scenarios. Affordable housing should be spread out all over the city. Even the new tax credit housing is clustered in one area which will eventually lead to the same issues we have seen in public housing. In NVA and DC you see affordable units set asides in mark rate developments which in my opinion is a better mix. This way affordability is spread out"

– Survey Participant

”

provide them with options and opportunities. Young people can learn how to be entrepreneurs, innovators, and employers as well as laborers and entry level staff.” Survey Participant

Create Project Safe Neighborhood Program that will work to address crime including gun violence among youth.

“I am in support of this idea if it directly engages youth and seeks to create a credible relationship with them. The voices of Norfolk’s youth should be at the center of this program.” Survey Participant

“I believe that focusing on gun violence should be the priority given the state of this issue in our neighborhoods.” Survey Participant

Reopen and revitalize recreational centers to 21st century technology to include digital check-in, tech education program, and virtual trainings.

“I highly support this idea.” Survey Participant

“This is critical and should be addressed first.” Survey Participant

“There should also be a non-tech, arts, and humanities-based aspect incorporated as well.” Survey Participant

“Please and thanks. Technology is here to stay and Ward 4 need get in the game or stay left behind like it is now.” Survey Participant

“ALL Great but just making sure this just doesn’t attract one kid but can be of interest to all. Help them understand how this works for them and how they will thrive in the future.” Survey Participant

“PLEASE! the children of our ward need ALL of the help that they can get from the city.” Survey Participant

“Most definitely. There needs to be a place for the youth to 'hang' and to learn and grow to keep them from becoming statistics and productive members of society.” Survey Participant

Recommendations for future consideration.

“Engage parents, encourage them to get involved and make it easy for them to get involved. Parenting classes and support for single parents could be made available as well.” Survey Participant

“Provide a Jr. Employee program for high school students to fill positions with the city to provide opportunities to see how the public sector works, while getting paid and stipend.” Survey Participant

Provide a Jr. Employee program for high school students to fill positions with the city to provide opportunities to see how the public sector works, while getting paid and stipend.”

– Survey Participant

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Economic Opportunity

During a small business roundtable, the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee invited local minority business owners to share their experience of starting and growing businesses in Norfolk and other cities in the Hampton Roads region. The panelists along with other minority business owners have expressed that additional support and training is needed. Business owners have suggested that additional resources are needed from the city and existing partners.

In their 2018 report, the Association for Enterprise Opportunity researched black business owners in America. “Black-owned businesses in America lag behind other firms in the United States and have done so for decades. There are fewer Black business owners than we might expect given the population size; businesses that do exist have fewer employees than nonminority firms; and revenues are much smaller for Black-owned firms, even when comparing the same industries.”⁶

Unlike other racial demographics where access to information, capital and mentorship has been readily available, oftentimes minority entrepreneurs may be the first in their communities and those same resources simply don’t exist. The City of Norfolk has small business resources but many of those resources have not been well advertised to meet the needs of the business owners most in need of the services. In addition, some resources that are being provided don’t meet the needs of business owners at various stages of business or those in certain industries.

According to a report by the House Committee on Small Business, black business ownership declined by more than 40%. This represents the largest drop across any ethnic group.⁷ The report details the impact Covid-19 has had on Black-owned businesses in the United States. Black-owned businesses were less likely to handle mandated closures due to lack of access to financial relief.

⁶ Alexander, M. C. (2020). Announcement of Mayor's Commission on Social Equity and Economic Opportunity. *Norfolk City Council Meeting*. Norfolk: City Of Norfolk.

⁷ (The House Small Business Committee Majority Staff, 2021)

Economic Opportunity Recommendations

To meet the needs of existing and future businesses the Economic Opportunity recommends that the City of Norfolk create a Minority Business Development Center. The center would increase accessibility and provide an in-person option for those who are seeking one on one business support. The center would also serve as a resource location for general information, continuing education classes, hosting business associations and various industry events. The Minority Business Development Center would focus its offerings to meet the needs of entrepreneurs at the beginner, intermediate and advanced stages of business.

This center would host seminars focusing on business opportunities, access to capital, grants, the procurement process, and bidding opportunities. In addition, this center would be a resource location for business owners seeking:

- Tax Planning & Accounting Services- QuickBooks training, tax preparation, financial statements, and projections
- Legal Services- key business document preparation and advising
- Marketing Resources- website development, branding assistance, social media planning
- Business planning- business plan development assistance
- Real Estate Assistance- Provide assistance in identifying physical locations for businesses.

This center would also offer virtual options, serving as a physical location for various entrepreneurs to utilize the center as a hub for virtual conferences, summits, and additional trainings.

While creating a physical center is an important step in supporting the start and growth of minority business owners, there is a need for ongoing business support, outreach, and access to resources.

“But connecting aspiring and current Black business owners to these supports and inspiring participation in them will require addressing a third hurdle: the trust gap. The experience of discrimination, bias, continued disappointment, and these persisting wealth and credit barriers manifest in a wariness — of banks, of other institutions, of potential would-be mentors and consultants — that cannot be denied or ignored. Therefore, outreach strategy must incorporate goals to rebuild that trust and establish renewed connections.”⁸

⁸ (The Association for Enterprise Opportunity , 2018)

To address historical mistrust and to provide ongoing support and resources the Economic Opportunity sub-committee recommends, **Monthly/quarterly "Pulse Checks" with businesses conducted by staff of the Minority Business Center. This builds on-going relationships (trust!) that provides support and guidance for start-ups, existing and expanding businesses.**

This is done through the Minority Small Business Center. Providing them ways to identify the roadblocks and challenges and by supporting them with Quarterly Business Check Ups and reviews.

Through interviews and conversations with minority business owners there has been a common response received that they are unaware of resources and services that the City of Norfolk has in place to promote and assist in the growth of small businesses.

There have been huge gaps between the city, the residents and current business owners on how and where to gain the assistances needed to build a strong viable business within the city. The present methods of marketing and advertising has been outdated and unsuccessful for years.

Minority owned businesses need support to maintain the momentum needed to grow their companies. This can only happen if they are aware of all the resources available through the city. As businesses recover from the pandemic and new businesses launch in Norfolk there is a need for on-going marketing and outreach to the minority business community, therefore the Economic Opportunity sub-committees third recommendation is to **develop a Marketing and Communications position to ensure regular outreach and engagement with the minority business community.**

It is important to know the audience that you are marketing to and to have unique strategies that will help the city reach various business communities. The Marketing and Communications position will create a campaign to highlight the value of the Minority Business Development Center and promote and share success stories of Norfolk's minority business community.

This Marketing and Communications position would also:

- Create a website for the Center and keep it updated. Make it colorful and eye catching.
- Use social media, billboards, flyers, digital newspaper and minority newspapers, local talk show, radio ads, and other media outlets to connect with the minority business community.
- Start and manage a blog for the center to amplify the resources and business services offered
- Promote social and education business events
- Market the Minority Business Center in a way that helps business feel that it is an honor to be a part of the center.

Economic Opportunity Partnership Options

The Center could collaborate with the City (Economic Development/ EDA) organizations that support small business owners and focus on providing them with resources to build capacity

- Black Brand, The Black Chamber of Commerce: <https://blackbrand.biz/> -
- <https://www.wtkr.com/news/black-brand-awarded-750k-to-help-norfolk-based-minority-owned-businesses>
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce: <https://hcccova.org/>
- Old Dominion University- <https://www.odu.edu/univ-impact/entrepreneurship>
- Norfolk State University- <https://www.nsu.edu/Academics/Research/Foundations-and-Centers-of-Excellence/NSU-Innovation-Center/About>

Health and Food Insecurity

Research has shown that there are conditions where individuals live, work, and play that have an impact on their overall health, quality-of life-risks and outcomes.⁹ The conditions are commonly referred to as Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) and it contributes to wide health disparities and inequities.

“For example, people who don't have access to grocery stores with healthy foods are less likely to have good nutrition. That raises their risk of health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity — and even lowers life expectancy relative to people who do have access to healthy foods. Just promoting healthy choices won't eliminate these and other health disparities. Instead, public health organizations and their partners in sectors like education, transportation, and housing need to take action to improve the conditions in people's environments.”¹⁰

In Norfolk, social, economic, and physical environments have an impact on the health of individuals, their families, and the community.

Lower socioeconomic status communities in Norfolk often must deal with the negative aspects of the environment, such as busy thru-streets, poor-quality and/or no bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, dilapidated parks and playgrounds, and crime, that deter physical activity which directly influence health outcomes. Additionally, due to past redlining, many neighborhoods lack infrastructure, resulting in increased flooding and heat islands, which also negatively affect health outcomes.

⁹ (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)

¹⁰ (U.S Department of Health and Human Services , n.d.)

Health and Food Insecurity Recommendations

In 2018, more than 1 in 10 households in Hampton Roads experienced “food insecurity.” The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting recession “exacerbated food insecurity in Hampton Roads, Virginia and across the United States.”¹¹ The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.¹² Before the COVID-19 pandemic among the people living in Norfolk 13.9% were food insecure.¹³

One of the five social determinants of health is Economic Stability. In the United States 1 in 10 people are living in poverty and cannot afford healthy food, health care or quality housing. With economic stability as one of the five social determinants of health, a main objective is nutrition and healthy eating with a specific focus on reducing household food insecurity and hunger¹⁴

In 2020, it is estimated that 1 in 8 Americans experienced food insecurity. This equated to over 38 million Americans, including almost 12 million children. Access to healthy, affordable food is imperative to achieving better health for the residents of Norfolk. Lack of access and nutritional education hinder families from making healthy food choices that can positively impact their health and address childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.

The health and food insecurity subcommittee determined that their first recommendation would be to **increase access to healthy, affordable food through the creation of Neighborhood Food Markets & Health Clinics**. The health clinics would be offered in partnership with local universities and medical programs. The subcommittee recommends that the food markets be individually owned in low to moderate income communities. It is recommended that the food markets are available in locations that offer adequate ability to walk and access various modes of transportation. The food markets could have a small footprint of 1,000 -1,500 square feet and provide the essentials including poultry, dairy, fresh fruits & vegetables. In addition, personal care items could be available in small quantities. It would be important for the food markets to accept various forms of payment to include: EBT/SNAP. Additionally, the food markets should offer:

- Cooking demonstrations and tastings of culturally different, nutrient dense foods to help expose the palate to better food choices.
- Create “Take It & Make It” bags (sold at cost) with a simple recipe, all the ingredients for a recipe included. If possible, have a video of the recipe being made and include a QR code on the recipe for more direction in making the recipe.
- Create a resource guide for childcare providers to incorporate more nutritious foods into their programs.

¹¹ (Old Dominion University , 2020)

¹² (Feeding America, n.d.)

¹³ (Old Dominion University , 2020)

¹⁴ (U.S Department of Health and Human Services , n.d.)

- Create a community garden program and provide support through Keep Norfolk Beautiful and/or Norfolk Department of Parks and Open Space.

The health clinics could be operated by Eastern Virginia Medical School and Norfolk State University to provide health and wellness checkups and possible dental care. We recommend community Social Workers be available to provide support and resources to residents as needed.

In addition to health services and healthy food options there is a growing need for mental health services. The health and food insecurity subcommittee recommend expanding **awareness of and access to mental health services by increased funding to the Norfolk Community Services Board to provide additional affordable mental telehealth services.**

The Norfolk Community Services Board is the primary provider of public mental health, substance abuse, and intellectual disabilities services for the City of Norfolk. A continuum of services spans from outreach and prevention through intensive psychiatric care, provided by highly clinically oriented service professionals with expertise in these service areas.¹⁵

Neighborhood and built environment are one of the five Social Determinants of Health. Neighborhoods play a significant role in the health and wellbeing of individuals. “Many people in the United States live in neighborhoods with high rates of violence, unsafe air or water, and other health and safety risks. Racial/ethnic minorities and people with low incomes are more likely to live in places with these risks.”¹⁶

With the impacts of climate change all communities throughout the country are experiencing hotter temperatures.

“Poor neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color tend to have less tree canopy coverage, more asphalt streets, and greater building density, all of which adds and retains heat. This is the urban heat island effect, a phenomenon cities across the country are attempting to mitigate. Richer, white areas tend to have parks, tree-lined streets, and fewer swaths of asphalt.”¹⁷

The health and food insecurity sub-committee recommends **decreasing “heat islands” and mitigating flooding by improving Norfolk’s tree canopy, increased flood prevention funding, and supporting Green Infrastructure Plan.**

Enhance recreational opportunities throughout the city.

- Increase the amount of park land per resident.
- Ensure communities have safe play facilities for children within walking distance and ensure equipment is accessible for those with disabilities. Provide shade areas, seating, and water fountains.

¹⁵ (City of Norfolk Community Services Board , n.d.)

¹⁶ (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021)

¹⁷ (Fast Company, 2021)

- Increase funding to Norfolk Parks & Rec to increase programming for youth and seniors.
- Expand hours at Rec Centers.
- Create a city “Rec Bus” loop to provide access to residents not within walking distance. Create an awareness campaign to ensure residents do not drive through - or play in - flooded streets.

The final recommendation is related to increasing the physical activity opportunities for Norfolk residents. The Health and Food Insecurity Subcommittee recommends **improving access to biking resources and increasing and maintaining sidewalks to encourage walking and biking**. This can be accomplished through the expansion of path and trail networks throughout the city. To further advance this recommendation, the Subcommittee suggests the following additional tactics to promote walking and cycling for transportation and recreation throughout Norfolk.

- Develop a program to fill gaps in the sidewalk network, especially on routes near schools, transit stops, and retail.
- Establish a sidewalk maintenance program to ensure that existing sidewalks are kept in a good state of repair.
- Improve access to bicycles, helmets, and bike locks for lower-income families through subsidies or repair programs.
- Work with Norfolk Departments of Parks and Open Space to create learn-to-ride and safe biking classes.
- Ensure the availability of adequate bike racks at all city facilities.
- Work with Norfolk Public Schools to better promote National Bike to School Day and create a companion event for Norfolk city employees.
- Convert all streetlights in Norfolk to LED for better lighting of streets.
- Consider installing “blue light” emergency phones in select areas.

Based on their research and interviews with local health experts the health and food insecurity subcommittee identified additional recommendations for the city to consider beyond their top four priorities. They include:

- Increase the number of Dieticians of color.
- Partner with Norfolk State University and Health Services Management program that concentrates in nutrition. Explore Nursing programs for nutrition and wellness to help in clinics.
- Work with NPS to promote this career option in their curriculum.
- Provide information about the dietician career tract in Norfolk Public Libraries and Norfolk Recreation Centers.

Health and Food Insecurity Partnership Opportunities

- Michael Palmer, President of P3 Properties. The Palmer family opened the Berkley Supermarket in August. By joining forces with them, it creates more buying power, and supports the community.

- Tidewater Food Alliance - is a newly formed non-profit organization conducting food and community assessments that will be able to provide needed information on where food is accessed and for how long.
- FEAST Virginia - a holistic health and wellness program that addresses obesity, type two diabetes and heart disease as well as providing a sustainable support system. The Train the Trainer Program has proven results that helps spread the FEAST program in a variety of communities.
- Norfolk Public Schools
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Traffic Commission
- Children's Hospital of the Kings Daughters
- Eastern Virginia Medical School
- Sentara
- Norfolk neighborhood Civic leagues
- American Council on Exercise
- SHAPE America: Society of Health and Physical Educators
- Elizabeth River Trail
- Norfolk State University- Allied Health Program
- Old Dominion University
- Keep Norfolk Beautiful
- Norfolk Environmental Commission
- Norfolk Public Library (Educational partner)

Affordable Housing

According to federal law, affordable housing is defined as housing in which a renter household spends no more than 30% of their gross monthly income for: (a) rent and utilities; or, for a homeowner, no more than 30% of its gross monthly income for: (b) mortgage-loan principal and interest, property taxes, insurance, utilities, and homeowner association dues (if any).¹⁸

Across the country there have been varied conversations on what affordable housing is, and it is often considered different things to different individuals, community groups or organizations discussing housing options and resources in the United States. The Executive Summary describing the Richmond Regional Housing Framework highlights the challenges with defining affordable housing as they were hosting community meetings and focus groups to inform the work of the housing framework.

“This was not surprising: affordable housing programs and policies are a web of complicated regulations and procedures spread across multiple layers of bureaucracy. Between tax credits,

¹⁸ (Partnership for Housing Affordability, 2021)

vouchers, block grants, and plenty of lengthy acronyms, most people understandably find it difficult to make sense of it all.”¹⁹

The Affordable Housing Subcommittee researched frameworks like the Richmond Regional Housing framework in addition, the Subcommittee met with several local housing subject matter experts better understand the housing challenges in Norfolk.

Donna Mills, Chief Housing Officer at the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (NRHA) provided the subcommittee with information on the Housing Choice Voucher program. NRHA was funded for 3,200 vouchers as of March 2021. Program participants are not allowed to pay more than 40% of their income after all deductions. This is to ensure that participants can still pay utilities, food, gas, etc.

Another NRHA staff member, LaShawn Fortes, manager of the HomeNet program shared with the group the homebuyer’s assistance available to Norfolk residents. It began in 2002 to support achieving homeownership by offering housing counseling, matching with lenders, and down payment assistance programs. The program offers assistance for families up to 120% area median income (AMI). As of May 2021, 1,029 homeowners have been assisted in their homeownership journey.

Affordable Housing Recommendations

While there are public assistance programs like NRHA available to serve low-income households, the affordable housing subcommittee recognized there are increased challenges for all residents to access information and resources on affordable housing options. The Affordable Housing Subcommittee recommends the City of Norfolk **create a user friendly, real-time, searchable database of affordable housing options. In addition to providing the affordable housing options, the database should include other useful information including housings proximity to transit, healthcare, grocery stores, and schools.** In conducting their research of online resources, the Subcommittee identified www.affordablehousing.com as a resource the City of Norfolk should consider partnering with to achieve this effort.

From the research and interviews completed by the Affordable Housing Subcommittee, it is evident that there are several housing resources in the city and throughout the region. Last year the City of Norfolk established its newest city department of Housing and Community Development. The St Paul’s Transformation project is a major component of the work of this new department. With new housing agencies being created and additional organizations focusing on housing needs, the Subcommittee sees a growing need to ensure that Norfolk

¹⁹ (Partnership for Housing Affordability, 2021)

residents know what housing resources exist. To help with coordination of housing related agencies and organizations the affordable housing subcommittee recommend **the creation of a robust online housing guide as well as a printed guide provided in libraries, rec centers, places of worship, the Foodbank and more.**

Affordable Housing is often built by a limited number of developers. Mel Price, Principal at Work Program Architects (WPA) met with the Affordable Housing Subcommittee and explained the “Missing Middle”. Missing middle housing describes a range of multi-unit or clustered-housing types (apartments, condominiums, and townhomes) that are compatible with single-family home design, but at a more accessible price point.

Norfolk’s typical household size/composition is shifting to more singles and more households without children. This leaves a mismatch between demand and what is affordable. Building more “missing middle” housing presents an opportunity for minority builders to enter the market and provides an opportunity for builders to “scale up”.

Due to lack of information on available land parcels or knowledge as to how to obtain financing for affordable housing, traditionally, only a handful of developers have built large, multifamily properties to address affordable housing. Smaller builders are left out of the opportunity to participate. The subcommittee recommends **removing barriers to developers building affordable houses by providing city-approved plan books for affordable housing, grants, and training.**

As a result of this recommendation there could be:

- increased homeownership in Norfolk
- Increased affordable housing stock in all neighborhoods of Norfolk
- Decreased eviction rates

Because of historical redlining that took place decades ago in Norfolk, most of the affordable housing inventory is concentrated in areas of poverty. It is important that affordable housing options be located throughout the entire city, deconcentrating poverty, and providing opportunity for all.

As the Affordable Housing subcommittee continued to learn about affordable housing challenges, Earl Fraley, Norfolk City Planning Commissioner met with the subcommittee to talk about “NIMBYism”, an acronym for the phrase "not in my back yard". His thoughts were that “NIMBYism” has a negative connotation and sometimes pits neighbor against neighbor. But on the other hand, sometimes can bring forth ideas that have not been considered by staff, encourage community participation, and provides a sense of how the neighborhoods are impacted. From the meeting with local housing experts and city leaders like Early Fraley the affordable housing subcommittee recognized a growing need for policy change. The subcommittee recommends that the city **establish inclusionary zoning policies to ensure the creation of more affordable units in Norfolk.**

From their research, the Subcommittee also learned about GEM parcels which are city acquired properties that have nuisance abatement liens and delinquent tax liens. The city GEM Lots program was designed to increase single family housing, recover delinquent taxes and nuisance abatement costs, and reduce the number of abandoned properties in the city.²⁰

In an effort to establish a fair and competitive process for selling a GEM parcel, the affordable housing subcommittee recommends the city **establish a fair auction process for city-owned GEM lots** in an effort to level the playing field and provide equitable access to Norfolk owned lots and encourage more building on the vacant properties.

In addition to the top recommendations from the Affordable Housing Subcommittee, the group has identified additional recommendations that would advance the priority recommendations listed above. They include:

- Create informational open houses for contractors and builders (NRHA, Dept. of Housing), with support from the Virginia Department of Housing & Community Development, Tidewater Builder Association
- Provide access to city-approved plan books for affordable housing (small lot design, missing middle design, etc.).
- Provide assistance with SWAM/DBE certification
- Encourage mentoring partnerships between large developers and smaller builders/contractors
- Encourage one-on-one coaching meetings with interested contractors and city staff
- Create a list of minority builders and contractors, which is updated two times per year
- Decrease the requirements for minority contractors in city contracts
- Showcase neighborhoods for interested developers so that they can learn the specifics about a community and its demographics
- Expand Renovate Norfolk grant program and market to minority contractors to become approved contractors
- Create a community-wide awareness campaign on the benefit and importance of affordable housing in Norfolk.
- Continue and increase utilization of the [Rent Ready Norfolk](#) program to better educate renters *and* landlords in order to create more livable, affordable rental units in Norfolk and increase the number of units that will accept housing vouchers

²⁰ (City of Norfolk , 2017)

- Increase awareness and utilization of NRHA’s [HomeNet](#) Ownership Center, which provides credit counseling, down-payment and closing cost assistance and other tools to increase homeownership.
- Adopt a holistic code enforcement program for derelict properties, partnering with and creating awareness of the RenovateNorfolk home renovation program, and partner with the non-profit and faith community to increase options for renovation and rehab of properties, similar to the City of Chesapeake’s [partnership](#) with Habitat for Humanity or [Project:HOME](#) in Richmond
- Work closely with partners to provide weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades to decrease the energy burden for Norfolk residents.
- Educate and incentivize builders to build affordable single-family homes and “missing middle” affordable housing stock
- Create a Norfolk Affordable Housing Fund that provides gap financing to developers
- Support the creation of a new non-profit land bank to acquire, hold, manage, and redevelop property in order to return these properties to productive use and increase affordable housing units.
- Ensure safe, quality, affordable housing choices for our growing senior population and those with disabilities. Expand the senior tax relief home ownership program to allow seniors to age in place.
- Work closely with regional partners to collectively address regional affordable housing needs.

Affordable Housing Partnership Opportunities

- City Of Norfolk Department of Housing and Community Development
- City of Norfolk Department of Parks and Open Space
- Norfolk Public Libraries
- Norfolk Redevelopment & Housing Authority
- Virginia Housing Development Authority
- Norfolk Faith Community
- Non-profit Community
- Dominion Energy, [Weatherization Program](#)
- Habitat for Humanity of South Hampton Roads
- Project:HOME
- Tidewater Builders Association
- VA Dept of Housing & Community Development
- VA Dept of Small Business & Supplier Diversity
- HousingForward Virginia
- ForKids
- The Planning Council

- United Way of South Hampton Roads
- Hampton Roads Planning District Commission
- Hampton Roads Housing Consortium

Education and Youth

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted disparities and inequities throughout our country. The impacts of the quarantine, social isolation and the overall pandemic remains to be seen, especially among youth and young adults. “However, preliminary research and anecdotal observations suggest that there is a coming tidal wave of behavioral health needs among youth, especially youth from vulnerable and historically marginalized communities.”²¹

The pandemic has also highlighted the achievement gap and inequities in public education. The lack of certifications and overall limited educational attainment leaves a gap in the trade and industry field. With the increase of clean energy jobs being proposed for the Hampton Roads region, this highlights a disparity where Norfolk youth and young adults are not equipped with the skills needed to meet the market demand for employment.

Several studies found that race, gender, and socioeconomic status is associated with low probability of enrollment into a four-year institution or two-year institution. “Research has provided evidence that race and ethnicity continue to be important factors in explaining achievement differences. However, much of the black-white and Hispanic-white achievement gaps are accounted for by social-class differences. That is, in the United States, race and often ethnicity are closely intertwined with social class.”²²

The report from the Economic Policy Institute highlighted that African American and Hispanic children are more likely to experience poverty in comparison to white children “because of the ways that race and ethnicity shape opportunity and economic outcomes. Black and Hispanic children are also more likely than their white or Asian-American counterparts to live in low-income, racially segregated neighborhoods and to attend schools with high concentrations of low-income, nonwhite students.”²³

²¹ (Shen , 2020)

²² (Economic Policy Institute , 2017)

²³ (Economic Policy Institute , 2017)

Education and Youth Recommendations

The research demonstrates the growing need for youth to have access to mentorship opportunities that will address the achievement gap and create exposure and access to resources and community support.

According to the National Mentoring Resource Center, “mentoring relationships with caring adults can be supportive to youth of color in a variety of ways.”²⁴ This includes helping build positive racial and ethnic identity, helping to offset the impact of oppression or systemic racism and providing exposure to different cultures, communities, or institutions.²⁵

The Education and Youth Subcommittee recommends the City of Norfolk **create a mentorship program for youth and/or young adults ages 14-25 to prepare them for adulthood by encouraging career exploration, team building, and goal setting.**

Mentorship can serve as a learning experience that consists of a long-term relationship focused on supporting the growth and development of youth and/or young adults. Mentorship relationships can be established based on a passion or interest of the youth or young adult. It can be opportunity for exposure and education about a particular industry and workplace. The Education and Youth subcommittee recommend that youth and young adults are paired with community professionals who have a recognized record of achievement and first-hand experience in the occupational field or career cluster that they’re most interested in.

The mentor can become a source of guidance, motivation, wisdom, role modeling, and support. The knowledge, advice, and resources shared depend on the format and goals of the mentoring relationship. Mentor support can provide a wide range of personal and professional benefits, which ultimately lead to improved performance in the workplace. Mentorship requires youth and young adults with preparation, it also encourages career exploration, vision, and goal setting.²⁶

Mentors are encouraged to provide the mentee with as much hands-on experience as possible and to provide a broad view of the business or industry as well as routine tasks and challenging opportunities. A mentorship relationship can be organized as a one-on-one or small group opportunity. The meetings can happen in-person or virtually.

Mentorship opportunities can help expose youth to additional opportunities like internships and apprenticeships. Internships are a work-based learning experience that places the student

²⁴ (National Mentoring Resource Center , n.d.)

²⁵ (National Mentoring Resource Center , n.d.)

²⁶ (Virginia Department of Education , n.d.)

in a real workplace environment to develop and practice career-related knowledge and skills for a specific career field related to a youth and/or young adult's career interests, abilities, and goals. Successful internships require collaboration, communication, and citizenship skills and can build on the exposure received from being mentored.

In addition to a mentorship program that will address the achievement gap and provide career exploration, there is an increasing need to address violence among youth in Norfolk.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, City of Norfolk Recreation Centers were closed, and sports programs were cancelled which caused a large strain on youth living in underserved neighborhoods. In communities with limited recreational opportunity along with other systemic inequities, gun violence has been prevalent. This has been evident in Norfolk. The Education and Youth subcommittee recommends the City of Norfolk **create Project Safe Neighborhood Program that will work to address crime including gun violence among youth.**

“Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a nationwide program designed to create and foster safer neighborhoods through a sustained reduction in crime, including, but not limited to, addressing criminal gangs and the felonious possession and use of firearms.”²⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic caused social and physical distance, lockdowns of businesses, schools, churches, and overall social life. The Project Safe Neighborhood program will create a base for community leaders, schools, parents, city officials, state, and federal agencies to work in collaboration to address access to guns, gang association, and community violence.

The program will target community engagement, prevention, and intervention, focused and strategic enforcement and accountability, policing hot spots, neighborhood patrolling, and ensuring streets are well-lit.

As the City of Norfolk works in partnership with Norfolk Public Schools, the faith community and other local youth serving organizations it is a need for the technological advances evident throughout many industries be present in attracting and maintaining the interest of Norfolk youth and young adults. As recreational center re-open and provide sports and programming opportunities to attract youth and young adults there is a need to incorporate technology. The Education and Youth subcommittee recommends the City of Norfolk **reopen and revitalize recreational centers to 21st century technology to include digital check-in, tech education program, and virtual trainings.** There are many positive impacts when recreational facilities utilize technology. The use of technology can help track the number of youth and young adult participants by enrollment. In addition, the use of technology can address the digital divide.

²⁷ (Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police, n.d.)

This is evident in Seattle Parks and Recreation where they have partnered with a community resources program that offers “effective technology-driven programs [that provide] education, recreation, and community development services for children, families, and neighborhoods,”²⁸

Providing technology access, training and even gaming opportunities can be impactful for the youth and young adults in Norfolk. To achieve the outlined recommendations, it is imperative that the City of Norfolk partner with Norfolk Public Schools along with a diverse cross section of organizations, sports clubs and community groups. It will take effective communication and collaboration to positively impact the opportunities for youth and young adults in Norfolk.

Education and Youth Partnership Opportunities

- Maritime: Shipbuilding & Repair - Hampton
- Virginia Maritime Association
- US Department of Defense
- Norfolk Emerging Leaders (NEL)
- Local Based Programs:
- Hampton Roads Community Foundation
- Garden of Hope, Incorporated
- Clever Communities in Action
- Church Programs and Community Groups.
- Local Greek Fraternities and Sororities
- Norfolk Public Schools Secondary Schools with sports and clubs
- Norfolk State University
- Old Dominion University
- Boo Williams Sports Plex

²⁸ (Springs, 2019)

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